

“Renewing God’s House”

2 Corinthians 7:6-8

A capital campaign to renew God’s house is not creating something new. It is rather renewing, stewarding, maintaining, taking care of what God has blessed this Divinity congregation with over the past 75 years.

Our Divinity boards (Building and Grounds, Communication and Technology, Education, and others) have done the research and received bids for the projects covered in our giving campaign – roof replacement, chapel paint, sanctuary projector, WIFI Security and fire system, sanctuary air-conditioning, thermostats, and lighting, tuckpointing, curb repair, new hallway floor, and updated technology for parish education.

For the past 21 years, I’ve had no problem using the 1970’s era big box T.V.’s with VHS and DVD players hooked up to them. They’re both on old-style metal rolling stands that I primarily use in the confirmation room and for adult Bible study in the choir room. I get teased a lot by younger people but that’s O.K. 13 months to go! Then you’ll have nice, big flat screens with computers connected to them. Pastor Brad and our Sunday School teachers will appreciate the 50-year update.

On this Miracle Sunday, we hope to reach our goal in commitments which can be spread out over the next 3 years. As a church following the Way of Jesus, we teach people a Bible-based model for giving as a matter of faith and spiritual discipline.

You won’t get your name engraved on a plaque if you give a lot of money. We give offerings at Divinity for God’s glory, not our own.

During the “Renewal of God’s House”, you were asked to pray about what God wants to do through you to accomplish his will for his church. Then, you are invited to trust God enough to take a leap of faith and give whatever he lays on your heart to give, not to be recognized or honored by other people, but to honor God.

What’s the significance of the giving campaign theme: “Renewal of God’s House”? When you look at what God is doing in and through all our Divinity ministries, it is because we are “All in” and “We’re better Together”. In the Old Testament, the wise writer of Ecclesiastes writes about the idea that two are better than one. Three is even better. “We’re better together”. We’re “all in”! The church is often referred to as one body consisting of many parts. And the church is at its best when every part is working together (Ephesians 4:16). “Renewal of God’s House” then is a reason for us to look deep inside the heart of this church and discover again who we are and what God has created us to be!

So how am I supposed to know what to give? It’s a matter of faith and God’s revelation, not human reason!

Step 1: Pray – Ask God this simple question: “What do you want to do through me to accomplish your will for this church?” **Step 2: Listen to God** – Keep asking until you “hear” God’s answer. If you don’t get anything – in other words, if you don’t get a pretty strong indication in your heart, soul, or mind as you pray each day --- then quiet your life until you can Be still. Listen. God will write a number on your heart, soul, or mind (Psalm 46:10). **Step 3: Take a leap of faith** – Trust God enough to do whatever he calls you to do, believing he will provide the means to make it happen.

Now you're giving as a matter of faith and experiencing the joy and freedom of Bible based giving without anyone telling you, other than God, what to give.

11 Corinthians 9:6-8 . . . ⁶The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

Timeless Truth #1: God owns everything.

We speak often of “our possessions”, but the basic fact of scripture is that we actually own “nothing”. We are stewards of all that God has placed in our trust, but not owners. Our “giving” is our management of God’s resources. The days we live, the positions we fill, the children we nurture, the people we influence, the homes we inhabit, the things we use, the money in our accounts – must all be recognized as belonging to God. Of these, the stewardship of money can be the most challenging.

We remember Martin Luther and what he said and wrote 500 years ago in Germany. Luther astutely observed; "There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, the mind, and the purse. Of these three, it may well be that we find the conversion of the purse most difficult".

The young shepherd David wrote, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." Jesus warned his disciples, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions".

I understand our prevailing passion is for ownership. We want to own houses, land, cars, and whatever else we can get our hands on. When I declared from the pulpit that "God owns everything" in Beatrice, Ne., I had an angry farmer in my office on Monday morning insisting that he'd worked hard for his farm, and it was his! I knew it was the farm his wife had grown up on, that he'd married well, but not wanting to anger him any further, I simply asked "What will happen to the farm when you die?"

No matter how wealthy we are, when we die, we leave it all. All of our earthly riches stay right here, becoming the property of someone else who will also one day abandon them. My great, great, great grandfather Gunkelman homesteaded along Abbeyville Road in Medina County in 1832. That land had been farmed by our family for 192 years. Now some of you have golfed on it and others are buying new houses springing up in the fields where I worked as a youth.

We are simply stewards for a brief time and when we die, we leave it all. God owns everything.

Timeless Truth #2: God's will is that we give wisely and generously.

God is delighted when we give out of a willing and joyful heart. "God loves a cheerful giver", St. Paul writes in our second lesson. God's expectation is that we invest his resources, not squander them, and give wisely.

Timeless Truth #3: God desires equal commitment, not equal contribution.

This truth is fundamental to the practice of biblical stewardship because it emphasizes the priority of making the most of what we are given by God.

The wealthy person who gives a large gift may not be giving sacrificially, while the poorer person who makes a far smaller gift may be giving in a radically sacrificial way. To give sacrificially, one gives up something and not just gives away something. Jesus taught this lesson when he spoke of “this poor widow who has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood”. True sacrifice results in personal cost to the giver.

Timeless Truth #4: God blesses the giver in proportionate measure. God does not need anything; yet, mysteriously, he wants us to grow in grace by giving to him. As we obey him in practicing this spiritual discipline, so are we blessed. Jesus said, "Give and it will be given to you." St. Paul in our second lesson reminds us that "the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work."

These 4 timeless truths makes us aware that we are the managers of a trust. God has given us a great responsibility and it's important that we make the most of it. The God of the universe has entrusted us with time, money, material things, and great opportunities. Our objective as Divinity Lutheran Church is to maximize the investment of all that he has put into our hands. Every day is a new opportunity for service and stewardship. Time is a precious commodity, and we have a limited allotment of days, hours, and minutes.

Every time I preside at a funeral, I'm reminded of what the scriptures advises us, "Be careful, then, how you live not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity."

There's no getting around the fact that the allure of money is strong and pervasive.

It permeates our entire, obsessive culture; but it brings no lasting fulfillment. It always creates a thirst for more unless one has the right attitude toward it and determines to manage it rather than be manipulated by it.

In the end, we are the renters who are motivated to please the true owner. God wants us to be people he can count on, people who live with a servant's heart, people who cheerfully manage the trust we have been given.

God's expectation is that we make the most of each of the assets we've been given. Think of all that you have under management: your money, your time, your possessions, your opportunities, your influence, your relationships, your children, and more. It is a great responsibility that requires faithfulness to the owner.

Here's the bottom line and the last line: To be a trustworthy steward, you must see everything in life as sacred. For the believer, everything in life is sacred, and everything is to be devoted to the Lord. Whatever your treasures, whatever your talents, dedicate them to God's purpose.

I join with St. Paul in saying to you, "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God".

May the Peace of God . . .

#696 – Jesus Calls Us; O'er the Tumult